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THE PHYSICIAN.

No. I.

HINTS RESPECTING FOOD, AIR, AND EXERCISE:

“To deliver rules—unqualified and absolute rules—into the hands of an untaught man, were to put a two-edged sword into the hands of an idiot.”

THERE is great diversity in the human stomach, with respect to the wholesomeness of various articles of diet; some of them proving poisonous in peculiar constitutions, which to mankind in general are salubrious and agreeable. Thus, there have been persons who never could eat flesh-meat, and there are some who cannot digest any kind of fruit. I have known even an Irishman, whose stomach could not bear a potato, and who was nearly poisoned by unconsciously swallowing some of that root, which had been disguised in a pudding by his friends, on suspicion that his antipathy was merely affected. In some persons, a boiled egg produces fever and eruption; and in some, the nettle-rash is caused by eating crabs, lobsters, or shrimps; in some, by mushrooms; in others, by cucumbers. Nothing produces it more frequently than the kernels of fruit, as the almond and the plumb; and the irritating ingredient seems to reside in the brown skin, surrounding the white part; for, if the kernel be blanched, no unpleasant effects are produced. The disorder thus caused lasts sometimes only for a few hours, sometimes for several days, and in still rarer cases it has proved fatal. The symptoms are fever, deranged stomach, languor, sickness, fainting, eruption with great heat, itching, and redness of skin, &c. &c.

Muscles are generally considered as poisonous; but they seem to be so only in peculiar constitutions. In the famine of 1816, some hundreds of tons, it is said, of these bivalves were taken off the muscle-bank at Holywood, and used as food, without their having, in any one instance, produced a bad symptom. Cockles are sometimes injurious: a near friend of mine is always made sick by eating even one of them. None of the British fishes, I believe, are poisonous: the roe of the barbel, indeed, is said to be so; but the truth of the assertion is not clearly established. Some of the fishes of tropical countries are extremely deleterious. The *yellow-billed sprat* will bring on convulsions and death, in half an

hour after being eaten; and it seems, that the poison resides in some of the viscera of the fish, or in the contents of its stomach; for, if gutted immediately when caught, it proves innocuous, though the entrails will destroy any animal which devours them. When our ships of war put into Gibraltar, and some other ports in the Mediterranean, orders are generally issued, forbidding the men to purchase mackarel, which are considered as poisonous. I believe, however, that they are innocent when used fresh, and that they are deleterious only when split and dried. I have seen many instances of their producing great disorder in seamen, and have experienced it personally also; but I observed that, in every case, the fish had been dried. An emetic speedily administered soon removed the complaint. The notion that fishes become poisonous from feeding on copper banks, is too absurd to deserve notice.

In certain states of body, it is possible that substances may act as poisons, which at other times have agreed perfectly well. This is particularly the case in persons who are subject to determination of blood to the brain, in whom apoplexy may be brought on by the use of indigestible substances, or those to which the stomach has not been recently accustomed. I make this remark, for the purpose of introducing a subject which I consider of very material consequence, and which cannot be too generally known. It is this. In women, for some weeks after their accouchement, there seems often to be a strong predisposition in the vessels of the brain to increased action, and consequent fullness of blood, from the sympathy of that organ with the stomach; and hence, apoplexy, convulsions, or death, may, during that period, succeed the use of certain articles of diet. Without theorizing, however, on the subject, it seems to be well ascertained, that *oysters*, under such circumstances, are *peculiarly dangerous*, and are sometimes *fatal*. In the fifth volume of the *Medical Transactions*, published by the College of Physicians of London in 1815, Dr. Clarke has stated six cases, three of which proved fatal, and three in which recovery was difficult; and in all, it was clearly ascertained, that the disease was brought on by eating oysters. As one of these cases happens to be short, I shall, for the sake of giving a clearer idea of the dangers arising from the cause mentioned, here state it in Dr. Clarke's words:—

“ The writer was desired by a medical man to see his wife, about 30 years of age, of a slender frame, who had been delivered, after a very natural labour, of a healthy child, and for several days had

continued free from any disorder. At length, she began to complain of headache, and a sense of internal fulness of the head. These symptoms not having yielded to bleeding, cathartics, and low diet, and a state of coma coming on, the husband became alarmed, and called upon the writer, who immediately visited her, and found her in a state of utter insensibility, with a fluttering pulse; and, in the course of sixteen hours, she expired. Upon making particular inquiries respecting the cause, from the husband, and especially as to the food she had taken, he could get from him no satisfactory information; but the nurse acquainted him, that *the patient had eaten about twelve raw oysters, on the day preceding the attack of headache*; and that, in all other respects, her diet had been of a very simple kind. The oysters had been taken on a supposition of their strengthening properties."

In all the six cases, oysters had been eaten before the attack; and, with the exception of *them*, the diet had been, in every instance, simple and light. It is not stated, whether any of the patients suckled the infant, which is certainly an oversight. It is rational to suppose, that, if the mother suckled the child, there would be much less danger of determination to the head; a large portion of the circulating blood being employed in the formation of milk. The paper, however, is most important; and the caution it conveys may possibly save many a life. It may be, that the fatal or dangerous results following the ingestion of oysters, in the cases alluded to, depended on peculiarity of constitution; but, should such be produced even once in a hundred times, it would be the height of imprudence, with such cases before our eyes, to sanction the practice; and I should suppose, that a similar caution ought to be preserved with respect to shell-fish of every description, for one month, at least, after delivery.

I shall not enter on the interminable subject of human aliment, except to give one or two hints.—Never eat too much. You have Galen's authority for it. His constitution was very delicate, yet he lived to an advanced age; and this he attributed, in a great measure, to the circumstance of his never rising from a meal, without still feeling some degree of hunger.

Another equally important rule is, to prefer those articles of diet which your *own* experience has proved to agree with you. I have said, that there is great difference in the digestive powers of different stomachs; and, indeed, there is much truth in the old proverb, that "One man's meat is another man's poison." If, therefore, by self-experience, you know that such and such articles of food are at the same time grateful to the palate, and also to the stomach,

while they produce no uneasiness or unpleasant effect, you should not be prejudiced against them by any report of neighbours or friends, because that in *them* they may produce different results. "We are often," says Dr. Fothergill, "asked what our opinion is respecting certain articles of food, as to their being more or less wholesome. Perhaps, the most pertinent answer, in common, would be that which is reported of the late Dr. Mandeville, of famous memory; who, being often the convivial guest of—I think it was one of the first Earls of Macclesfield, was frequently interrogated on the subject of diet. 'Doctor, is this wholesome?'—'Does your Lordship like it?'—'Yes.'—'Does it agree with your Lordship?'—'Yes.'—'Why, then, it is wholesome.'"

A proper regulation of the appetite is, next to air and exercise, the great preserver of human health; and nature in general takes this regulation into her own hands. Her dictates, however, are often perverted, especially by over-fond parents, in the management of their children. When a child gets weakly, pale, and dispirited, no matter what the cause may be, it must be strengthened, *poor thing*; and therefore it is crammed with fifty different articles which the healthiest constitution has trouble in mastering. Among other things, it must have egg beat up with wine, in the forenoon, and that fuddles it till dinner time: then, to strengthen it, after having good part of the dinner forced down its throat, by being coaxed and flattered, and getting the promise of a nice little doll, or a beautiful little horse, it must have more wine, and this fuddles it till bed-time. It is then crammed again; and this system goes on, till the poor thing is at last set up altogether; the stomach, like a jaded horse, being unable to proceed farther, until recruited by a little rest from this arduous and unremitting duty. Well, then, the doctor is sent for, and the enormous load of crudities is got rid of, by a proper use of medicines, and the little martyr again begins to enjoy the blessings of existence. But if it was well stuffed before, it must be crammed to the mouth now, *to restore its strength*; for you might as well convince many mothers that black is white, as that food will not, *in every instance*, impart strength in proportion to its quantity and richness.

Let me not be misunderstood, however. I do not say, that wine and very nutritious diet are never requisite for children. The contrary is the fact in many cases: but I assert, that of such cases, mothers can very seldom be proper judges; and that, in nineteen times out of twenty, the cramming system they pursue is highly detrimental, not only to the present, but the future health of their offspring.

I shall now give a caution of an opposite nature ; and that is, to warn mothers, when they have in hire a wet nurse, to be fully satisfied that such nurse has a sufficiency of milk. If she have not, and is not of strictly honest principles, she will consider it her interest to conceal the defect ; and I am confident, that under such circumstances, many infants have pined to death, worn out by gradual starvation. This is an awful reflection, and will, I hope, without farther words, make a due impression.

The proper regulation of diet, is of all things most conducive to an exemption from stomach complaints. Diseases of this class are most distressing ; often very obstinate ; and there are none perhaps so much tampered and quacked with. They often foil men who have grown gray in studying them ; though at the same time, there are multitudes of persons of all descriptions, both in town and country, who pretend to their cure. Bitters, nauseating drugs, and spices of all descriptions, are taken into the service of these untaught prescribers. One cures with bog-bean ; another with gentian root ; a third with ginger-tea ; and were their materia medica restricted to articles equally simple, comparatively little harm would result : but they deal in endless compounds ;

The deadly drugs in double doses fly :

and though they sometimes cure, they much more frequently do irreparable harm. The state of the liver, and of the intestinal secretions of the patient, must be known, even to the best educated physician, before he can prescribe, on a rational foundation, for these complaints ; and to imagine that untaught persons can have any real knowledge of them, is just about equally absurd, as to suppose that they could tell what is wrong in the works of a clock, by reading the figures on the dial-plate. Sometimes they do chance to succeed ; but it is a mere chance. A gentleman once told me his watch never went well till after it had a fall ; and it is just by as blind an accident, that these meddlers with forbidden things sometimes stumble upon a cure. In cases of disordered stomach, then, the best counsel I can give now is, what was recommended by an old physician to an acquaintance who met him by chance. " Doctor," said he, " I am greatly troubled with such and such symptoms ; what do you think I should take ?"—" Take ?" said the physician ; " you should certainly take advice."

I shall now offer a few remarks on the subject of *exercise*. This is the great preserver from indigestion and hypochondriasis ; and, without its assistance, we shall often fail in

removing these complaints, in spite of every medicine and plan that may be adopted. When the stomach gets deranged, whether from improper food, grief, anxiety, or any of the many causes which affect it, the mind and the stomach go hand in hand, and mutually influence each other; grief disorders the stomach, and indigestion disorders the mind. In these cases, therefore, the state of the latter must be attended to and regulated, as well as the state of body.—I make this observation, in order to show, that exercise, however effectual in restoring or preserving health, will not succeed, unless the mind be employed also. This is more especially true in hypochondriacs, who brood almost incessantly over their real, or, what is to them equally distressing, their imaginary evils. In them, exercise serves frequently only to fatigue, without strengthening; and, with this view of the subject, we may explain the great utility to persons who are necessarily confined to their offices a great part of the day, of having a house in the country. In going home in the evening, the mind is occupied with thoughts of their family, whom they are about to see; and, on returning to town in the morning, it is occupied with thoughts of the business to be transacted through the day. The mind is thus employed, as well as the body; and the exercise so taken is highly conducive to health. But it will be often experienced, that, when a delicate person rides or walks a certain distance every day, for the *express purpose* of improving his health, no such end will be obtained. He will brood over his symptoms: the very act of taking exercise, knowing the object for which it is done, will, during the whole time, rivet his attention to himself and his disorder; and he will return home unrefreshed and unimproved, depressed in spirits, and weaker than before in body. It is by giving the mind fresh vigour, and new employment, as well as by drawing the patient from too minute reflection on his own case, that tours to watering-places so often operate in restoring health, and, as it were, renewing the constitution. There is no doubt, that the waters themselves are often important agents; but, in a large proportion of cases, the benefit derived arises altogether from change of scene, giving new activity to both mind and body. If a patient's circumstances prevent his leaving home, much may be done, by giving him a turn for some pursuit that will draw him often and much into the open air. It is said, that the study of botany, or other branches of natural history, has sometimes proved, in this way, of the greatest advantage.

I shall dismiss this subject, by telling a little anecdote, which might almost be considered a lecture itself. The

celebrated Dr. Sydenham had a patient, whom he had long prescribed for, on account of one of these complaints. But his prescriptions were inefficient; and, at last, Sydenham acknowledged that his skill was exhausted—that he could not pretend to advise him any farther: “but,” said he, “there is a Dr. Robinson, who lives at Inverness, who is much more skilled in complaints of this kind than I am; you had better consult him. I will provide you with a letter of introduction, and I hope you will return much better.” The patient was a man of fortune, and soon took the road; but travelling was a very different undertaking then, from what it is now, and a journey from London to Inverness was not a trifling one. He arrived, however, at the place of destination; but no Dr. Robinson was to be found, nor had any one of that name ever been in the town. This, of course, enraged the gentleman very much; and he took the road back to London, raging, and vowing vengeance on the doctor. On his arrival, he vented all his rage on the latter, and abused him for sending him a journey of so many miles, for nothing. When his fury was a little abated—“Well, now,” said Sydenham, “after all, is your health any better?”—“Better!” said he; “Yes, Sir, it is better. I am, Sir, as well as I ever was in my life; but no thanks to *you* for that.”—“Well,” said Sydenham, “you have still reason to thank Dr. Robinson. I wanted to send you a journey, *with an object in view*. I knew it would do you good: in going, you had Dr. Robinson in contemplation; and, in returning, you were equally busy in thinking of scolding me.”

Now, I consider this anecdote so good a commentary on the few hints I have given respecting air and exercise, that with it I shall quit the subject, and the present paper.

* * *

THE MEETING AND PARTING.

BY THOMAS K. HERVEY.

I.

WHEN in yon fading sky
Summer light closes,
And the lone spirit's sigh
Steals o'er the roses,—
When in the waters still
Twilight is sleeping,
And on the purple hill
Night dews are weeping,—
Where o'er the slumbering lake
Droops the fond willow,
While the breeze cannot wake
Even a willow,—
When there is silence in each leafy bower,
There be our meeting—alone—in that hour!

II.

Oh! let no cold eye
Of others be o'er us!
Stillness be spread on high,
Beauty before us!
Then down thy lovely cheek
Silently stealing,
Should a warm tear speak,
The fulness of feeling,
Fondly I'll chide, sweet!
That symbol of sadness;—
Surely when lovers meet,
All should be gladness!
Stay till along the sky daylight is darting,
Then will we weep—'tis our moment of parting!